

INDIA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE

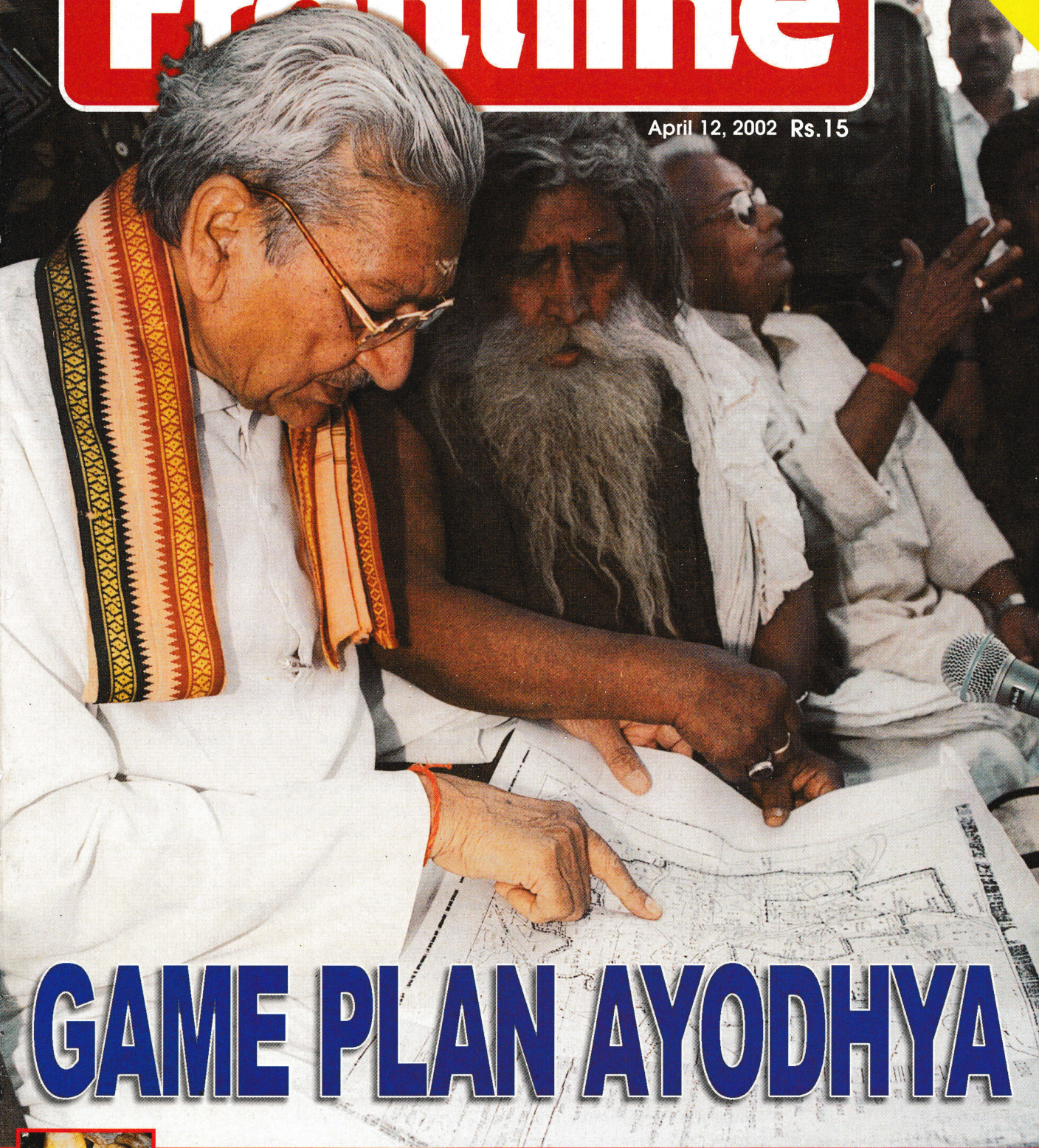
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IN KARNATAKA

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# Frontline

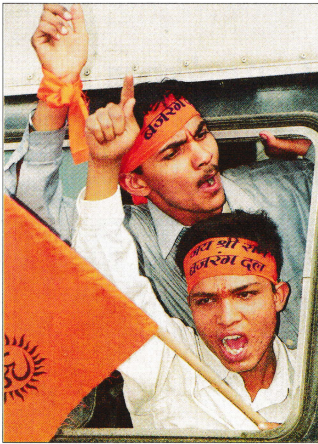
April 12, 2002 Rs.15



## GAME PLAN AYODHYA

Investigation: Karnataka's Kidney Trade Scandal





The Vishwa Hindu Parishad has yet again been thwarted, with the Supreme Court making an intervention. Now, the internal dynamics of the Sangh Parivar being what they are, the developments of mid-March cannot but impact on the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre.....4



A *Frontline* investigation turns up explosive data that reveal the scale and dynamics of Karnataka's illegal kidney trade. Exploiting poverty and deprivation, a sophisticated network that draws a clientele from near and far has emerged. Precious little has been done to thwart it.....61

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On the cover: Ashok Singhal and Ramchandra Das Paramhans at a press conference in Ayodhya on March 13. Photograph: Subir Roy

Cover design: U. Udaya Shankar

quality standards (but to apply them selectively to disadvantage public services), to weaken sources of resistance and stoke support, to restrict public capital and current expenditure, to restructure the sources of public revenue, to claim risk-minimising contracts with residual state providers, to present the transformations of service into commodities, supply and demand as a 'technology' transfer and abolish the concept of public service. In both broadcasting and health conglomerates diversified, concentrated and differentiated; pay became spectacularly more unequal, product quality was shaped by commercial interests and residual services deteriorated and were rationed. New labour politicians, whose parties are increasingly funded by corporate interests, operate in centralised and 'depoliticised' ways that take them away from the electorate, unions and activists and enable them to naturalise markets, audit and de-democratisate the state.

At a time when British Prime Minister Tony Blair has called public service unions 'wreckers', Colin Leys shows just who the real wreckers are. He argues that public services are a key aspect of a democratic society; they express such a society's collective interests and help shape it at the same time. There is never no alternative. Public services can be provided in many ways, from voluntary work, through non-profit trusts to state provision. These can be more efficient – not simply in terms of costs but also in the quality of outcomes – than are firms dominated by short-term shareholder interests. Leys indicates what is to be done: public services need a clear philosophy that is publicised, celebrated and funded through taxation. They need practical policy, encouraging innovation and dynamism where it can be justified on public service grounds. They need active political protection and defence from the constant attempts to invade, which 'markets', aka capital, are bound to make.

This is a richly researched, well-structured, beautifully written, and compellingly argued book, and one which offers an original analysis of the hegemonic politics of markets. It could not be more relevant to our times. Buy this book, but do not add it to the gently groaning shelf. Keep it much closer to hand. It is very relevant to India. ■

Barbara Harriss-White is Professor of Development Studies in the University of Oxford.

## ■ BOOKS

# Professional sheep

M.V. RAMANA

**Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-battering System that Shapes Their Lives** by Jeff Schmidt; Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, 2000; pages 336, \$26.95.

**I**N his classic *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (Monthly Review Press, 1974) Harry Braverman observed that the system of monopoly capitalism had brought into being a sizable "new middle class". Unlike the middle class of the earlier era which "possessed the attributes of neither capitalist nor worker", the new middle class "occupies its intermediate position not because it is outside the process of increasing capital, but because, as part of this process, it takes its characteristics from both sides. Not only does it receive its petty share in the prerogatives and rewards of capital, but it also bears the mark of the proletarian condition."

The professionals who are the subject of Jeff Schmidt's *Disciplined Minds*, appropriately and explicitly subtitled *A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-battering System that Shapes Their Lives*, belong for the most part, to the category discussed by Braverman. Schmidt has taken up, and succeeded admirably, in the ambitious task of explaining and exposing the politics of the modern workplace, which involves a high degree of "professionalisation," and the process of indoctrination of professionals, as well as outlining ways of resisting the process. A physicist by training, Schmidt was staff editor at a standard "professional journal", *Physics Today*, for 19 years. And for writing this book, the journal gave him what may be the best compliment that the author of a book such as this could be given – it fired him. (For details about the cashiering and the many protests that the action has drawn, see the website: <http://disciplined-minds.com>).

Schmidt's background and long expe-

rience are clearly apparent and result in remarkable insights. Often he puts his finger right on the spot, leading to a sense of 'I had the same feeling but had never articulated it this way'. Historian Howard Zinn's praise is apt: "I have been waiting a long time for someone to write this book, and Jeff Schmidt has done it."

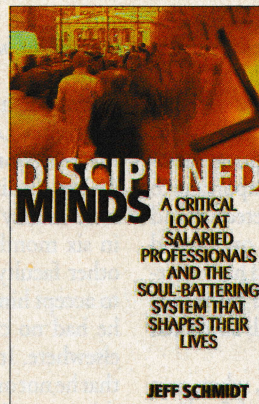
The first part of the book argues that professionals who do the bulk of the creative work are "politically subordinate clones" who form a "trusted cadre" that boosts the power of corporations and other hierarchical organisations. Schmidt observes that though professionals may be

more liberal than non-professionals on a range of personal issues, they are more conservative on two key issues: democracy (professionals are less supportive of a greater democratic distribution of power) and attitudes in the workplace. The latter is particularly important to employers since in many jobs in fields as varied as journalism and education to commercial art, the employee's view of the world affects "not only the

quantity and quality" of the product, but "also the very nature of the product". Thus, a prerequisite for such jobs is the willingness and the ability to exercise what Schmidt terms "ideological discipline".

All this may seem fine in the abstract or even when applied to the case of professionals who work under a boss for a salary. But Schmidt goes a step further and examines what may be the hardest case – scientists in universities – and observes how their work is strongly influenced by external forces. In a wonderfully evocative phrase, he terms the source of their motivation "assignable curiosity".

It is no secret that a major part of the research in universities is funded by government sources. Through such funding, Schmidt points out, the government, "for all practical purposes, will have ordered" that the university scientists perform a certain amount of research in specific areas such as nuclear physics or molecular biology. "Though this is not the kind of order that names specific researchers, it is an



order that individual university professors do end up carrying out." What makes the effect of such directing of research and, more important, the purposes it serves, less apparent, is the elaborate concealment game that goes on. Schmidt cites the case of a research project that was funded by the United States Air Force at the University of California, Irvine, from where Schmidt got his Ph.D. The project was headed by two physicists specialising in solid state research. In their application the physicists described the objectives of their work as follows: "The objective of the proposed programme of theoretical research is an increased understanding of the interactions of electromagnetic radiation, particularly in the infrared, with matter. To be studied are the consequences of the inelastic scattering of electrons from ionised impurities in a doped semiconductor on infrared absorption in the Drude tail..." (and so on).

This description makes little sense to the non-initiated. Neither does it suggest why the U.S. Air Force should be funding it. To get at least some clues, one has to read the Air Force's description of the same project: "The infrared optical properties of these materials are important to the development of infrared detectors and coherent sources, integrated optics and electro-optical techniques, and high energy infrared laser windows and mirrors as well as interactions of materials subjected to laser beams."

Much of the terminology, when seen in the context of the source of funding, clearly points toward weapons use. Indeed, the U.S. Airforce, in its description of an earlier project by the same scientists, reveals why it funds such theoretical research: "Rather than trial-and-error testing of a wide variety of materials this research seeks a fundamental understanding of the quantum interactions in and on crystalline solids."

Thus, the Air Force or other government agencies fund what may seem as theoretical, abstract, "blue sky" research because it has the potential to be used for developing weapons. Most professional scientists either seem unaware of this connection, or choose to turn a blind eye to it. As to how they end up that way, one has to turn to the second part of the book with its "field work" component.

In this section, Schmidt describes the "intellectual boot camp known as graduate or professional school", which, "with its cold-blooded expulsions and creeping indoctrination, systematically grinds down the student's spirit and ultimately produces

obedient thinkers – highly educated employees who do their assigned work without questioning its goals". This discussion on the graduate school constitutes the most detailed section of the book. Methodically going through each step of the process which includes obtaining an admission; doing courses and assignments; qualifying in examinations; researching under a supervisor; and finally getting employment, Schmidt reveals their role in "narrowing the political spectrum", establishing "primacy of attitude" and producing "subordinate" professionals.

Schmidt adopts an engaging writing style, full of anecdotes. Many of them gave me a sense of *deja vu*. For example, there was this classmate of mine in the Ph.D. programme. Let us call him "F". "F" was clearly bright, passing his written qualifying exam at the end of his very first semester and doing well in most of his courses. Unfortunately, one of the senior professors in the research group, whom "F" wanted to work with, took a dislike for him. The reason: "F" prominently expressed his political convictions by wearing a Lenin button. Consequently, the professor made sure that "F" flunked his oral qualifying exam. Though students were usually given a second chance within six months, the professor told all the other faculty members in the group not to accept him as a student. "F" then knew he had no choice but to seek his Ph.D. elsewhere. It is testimony to "F's" calibre that he not only completed his Ph.D. from this new university at the same time as or even before others in our class did, but that he went on to a productive career.

My purpose in recalling this story is not just to buttress Schmidt's arguments, but also to point out how many of our own experiences are reflected in this book, which then provides us a framework with which to make sense of these experiences; not as individual aberrations but as a systematic pattern.

However, all is not gloom and doom. In the final part of the book, Schmidt offers some tips for resisting the process of indoctrination that he describes in the first part. The first step, of course, has come earlier through the process of exposing how the system works. "Simple awareness of how indoctrination systems work is a big step toward undermining their effectiveness." Schmidt then draws on a highly unexpected source, "Field Manual No. 21-78" – the U.S. Army's instructions to soldiers for resisting brainwashing and exploitation as prisoners of war (POW). There are interesting insights to

be found here since in "graduate school, as in the POW camp, the toughest struggle is not over whether you will survive the process, but over what sort of person you will be when you get out". These instructions suggest ways of "working with others" through organising, which is "almost magically empowering", and by resisting subordination.

A book like this cannot be without its faults. Though the anecdotal style of writing makes for easy reading, it also leaves one feeling uneasy because it seems to over-generalise. One can think of counter-anecdotes, which then leaves one with the hard task of weighing the different kinds of evidence. In part, this problem results because Schmidt has not situated his work adequately within the larger literature on the role of professionals in modern society, which extends back several decades. I realise that doing so might have made the book too academic, resulting in the loss of potential readers, but there are (there should be?) ways of incorporating older insights in ways that do not scare away interested people.

There is also the problem commonly encountered in class analysis – the difficulty in coming up with a precise definition. At one point we are told that a professional is more than one possessing "technical knowledge and skill" but "is a product of the schools" with "paper credentials". Elsewhere, professionals "sell to their employers more than their labour power, the ability to carry out instructions. They also sell their ideological labour power, their ability to extend those instructions to new situations. It is this sale that distinguishes them from non-professionals..." To be sure, these descriptions overlap. But there also seem to be situations where it is hard to determine if an individual is a professional or a non-professional.

These minor faults apart, *Disciplined Minds* is an important book, to be read carefully and its insights to be applied to the world around oneself. Though primarily a work of sociology, it will be of immense use to those interested in a variety of fields such as labour studies, education, science and technology studies and political science. While it may not gladden the hearts of all readers, it would certainly illuminate, and hopefully radicalise some.

Oh, and another thing. The book has great cartoons. ■

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